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Since his birth on July 18, 1954, Tobias Picker was destined to be a musician and composer of the highest rank. He learned to garner the spurts of energy that come with his Tourette's Syndrome into his piano compositions starting at the early age of eight, and since the age of twenty-three his compositions have been performed on the concert stage. His nearly lifelong friendship with pianist Ursula Oppens played a large role in the success of Picker's piano works, as she performed and recorded all the pieces in the collection *Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano*, published by Schott, on the album *Keys to the City*, produced by Wergo. Although Picker is known widely for his five operas to date, his piano works continue to appear on concert stages across this country and others. Picker studied composition with serialist composers Charles Wuorinen, Elliott Carter, and Milton Babbitt, and his early works for piano are similarly marked by 12-tone serialism. Around the same time that Picker began composing opera in 1994, he abandoned serialism altogether in favor of a neo-romantic tone in his piano compositions. An analytical look into selected piano works of Picker provides insight into his compositional development spanning over two decades. An interview with the composer confirmed many of my findings.

A STUDY OF SELECTED PIANO WORKS BY TOBIAS PICKER

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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PREFACE

I first learned about Tobias Picker several years ago when Liz, the mother of three of my piano students mentioned to me, “My mother’s first cousin is a famous composer who lives in California.” She went on to inform me that her relative composes mostly opera, so I probably would not have heard of him. She was right. I had never heard of Tobias Picker.

When I decided to return to graduate school after ten years of performing and teaching piano, I knew I needed to discover a new and interesting topic about which to write my dissertation. Little did I realize that I already had. I remembered the conversation that occurred with Liz years ago, so I decided to do a little research into the composer Tobias Picker. I was thrilled to find he had a very informative website that included many of the piano works he had written long before he began composing opera. I presented to my committee chair Dr. John Salmon my idea of researching and writing about selected works for piano by Tobias Picker, and he agreed that the idea held promise.

With her mother’s help, Liz was able to get me in touch with Tobias Picker to share my own background information and desire to host an interview with him to aid in my research. I immediately completed CITI Training so that I could be approved by the International Review Board to interview Picker whenever he would be available. The I.R.B. determined on May 28, 2019 that my project was

exempt from needing approval, so at that point I was ready to host an interview as soon as Picker had time to speak with me.

As it turned out, I completed the first draft of my dissertation before I interviewed Picker on July 21, 2019. The timing was fortunate because I was able to formulate very specific questions to ask him that would confirm, deny, or expound on the findings I had already made. Picker was very generous with his time as he talked with me over the phone from his home in Tulsa, Oklahoma where he currently holds the position of Artistic Director of Tulsa Opera.

While pursuing my research, I found that another doctoral candidate, Moye Chen, had written a dissertation about the piano works of Tobias Picker at the University of Illinois under Dr. William Heiles in 2018. After trying to gain access to the dissertation to aid in my own research, I discovered that Chen's dissertation was locked and could not be viewed by anyone. Thus, the research I conducted in this dissertation and the musical analyses are my own. I would however enjoy reading Chen's interpretation of Picker's piano compositions someday if he makes his document public.

Besides seeking IRB approval in order to interview Tobias Picker, I received permission on September 6, 2019 from Schott Music Corporation, the sole publisher of Picker's compositions, to include examples of his copyrighted works in my dissertation. Documentation of permission forms appears in Appendix B.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO TOBIAS PICKER

Tobias Picker, an American composer born on July 18, 1954 in New York City, is the recipient of many distinguished awards including the Bearn's Prize (Columbia University) in 1978, a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1981, and a Charles Ives Scholarship in 1984. He earned the Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1992 and was elected to lifetime membership in the Academy in 2012. Picker served as the first composer-in-residence of the Houston Symphony from 1985-1990 and has served as composer-in-residence for the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival in 1987 and the Pacific Music Festival in 1995. From 2010-2015, Picker served as Artistic Director of Opera San Antonio. He has served as the Artistic Director of the Tulsa Opera since 2016.¹

Tobias Picker professes he was born to be a musician, and he has always found his musicality to be all consuming. In his earliest years of life, he recognized and tapped out tunes, and by the age of four he was playing and

¹ Tobias Picker, "Tobias Picker Bio," May 9, 2016, accessed June 3, 2019, <http://tobiaspicker.com/bio/>.

improvising at the piano.² Also at this age he insisted on dressing himself, and his grandfather noticed that he was wearing two different socks. His grandfather commented, “Oh, I see. Two different socks. Wagner did this too. This is the sign of a genius.”³ On Picker’s mother’s side of the family, a feud regarding who held the position of best composer in history persisted throughout his childhood. Picker prodded his grandfather saying, “What about Mozart?” followed by the reply, “Deedle deedle dee music!” While still a young child Picker finally mentioned these conversations between grandfather and grandson to his mother and said to her, “But I thought Beethoven was the best composer who ever lived.” She told Tobias to ignore his grandfather because he was wrong. Eventually Picker’s musical tastes matured to the point where he liked and admired the music of Stravinsky, but he admits, “I didn’t understand Stravinsky as a small boy, but I’m not sure Stravinsky is meant to be understood by small children.”⁴

Picker’s mother was very interested in the biographies of famous composers, and she read them to her son in place of traditional bedtime stories. Picker knew from the age of six that he would be a composer one day too. He remembers listening to Rachmaninoff, Brahms, and Gershwin around this time,

² Oliver Sacks, *Musophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2007, 2008), p. 99.

³ Tobias Picker, interview by Andreas Mitisek, “Meet the Composer,” *Long Beach Opera*, December 3, 2014, Viewed on YouTube May 31, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3g0xinPRT6A>.

⁴ Ibid.

and he also remembers hearing a lot of Richard Strauss as a child. Watching *Amahl and the Night Visitors* by Gian Carlo Menotti, which was commissioned by CBS and shown on television once a year, influenced Picker at the age of eight to one day write opera himself.⁵ More influences came his way after hearing Leonard Bernstein's *Young People's Concerts* at the New York Philharmonic, and at the age of nine, Picker saw Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West* and knew for certain he would become an opera composer.⁶ Once he had decided on a career in composition, Picker says he gave himself "no other option. I didn't even take the PSATs, much less the SATs, because I knew I was going to go into the conservatory."⁷

Picker's mother was a shoe designer and a painter who began selling her paintings only at the age of 95 when she had outlived her money.⁸ His father, a radio news writer who later worked in public relations at CBS,⁹ was keenly interested in literature and theater. Picker's upbringing by such artistic parents nearly guaranteed that he would one day become a composer whose music, as

⁵ Picker, "Meet the Composer," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3g0xinPRT6A>.

⁶ Robert K. Schwarz, "A Composer Freed by Opera to be Tonal and Tuneful," *New York Times*, (May 02, 1999) pp. 17, accessed April 15, 2019, *ProQuest*, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/431178764/3721746D5C4C486DPQ/1?accountid=14604>.

⁷ Brian Kellow, "The Key to Tobias," *Opera News* 70, no. 2 (August 2005): p. 20, accessed April 14, 2019, *Proquest*, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/224200677/B002EC59AD984732PQ/3?accountid=14604>.

⁸ Picker, "Meet the Composer," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3g0xinPRT6A>.

⁹ Kellow, "The Key to Tobias," p. 20.

described by *BBC Magazine*, “displays a distinctively soulful style that is one of the glories of the current musical scene.”¹⁰

As a small child at the age of six years old, Picker developed Tourette’s Syndrome, a neurological condition marked by excessive physical tics and obsessive-compulsive habits.¹¹ The syndrome went undiagnosed until age 30, and since his family and friends did not know about Tourette’s in the 1960s, Picker’s childhood was filled with constant orders from others to stop fidgeting and hold still. He was therefore a very unhappy child, but a streak of good fortune came his way when Picker was eight years old, and his parents bought him a piano. As he spent hours at the piano, the symptoms of Tourette’s virtually disappeared, and so he continued to practice intensely and gained a virtuoso technique very quickly.¹² He started composing in earnest for the piano at this time as well,¹³ and at the age of eleven, Picker began taking weekly piano lessons at Juilliard’s Preparatory School.¹⁴ Picker feels now that his Tourette’s enters into his creative imagination. The syndrome may also contribute to his music by shaping and modulating it.¹⁵

¹⁰ Picker, “Tobias Picker Bio,” <http://tobiaspicker.com/bio/>.

¹¹ Kellow, “The Key to Tobias,” p. 20.

¹² Schwarz, “A Composer Freed by Opera to be Tonal and Tuneful,” p. 17.

¹³ Lynn Malcolm, “The Music in Your Brain,” *Radio National show from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, (October 6, 2013) accessed June 3, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/allinthemind/the-music-in-your-brain/4985414>.

¹⁴ Kellow, “The Key to Tobias,” p. 20.

¹⁵ Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, p. 252.

Today Tobias Picker is most well-known for the five operas he composed and produced, but his path to opera was paved with numerous compositions in multiple genres including chamber music, symphonies, art songs, and the piano solo and piano concerto.

I am going to discuss Picker's piano compositions from his 2008 score, *Collected Works for Solo Piano*.¹⁶ This collection was released in 2009 alongside his album *Keys to the City – Works for Piano* performed by Ursula Oppens and featuring a performance of the solo part of *Keys to the City, Version for Two Pianos* by the composer himself.¹⁷ Additional titles on the album are *Four Etudes for Ursula, Old and Lost Rivers, Three Pieces for Piano, Where the Rivers Go, When Soft Voices Die, and The Blue Hula*.

I will be discussing the historical background of the pieces on the 2009 album *Keys to the City– Works for Piano* and providing analyses of the works performed. Picker describes his music as always being tonal, even when it sounds atonal, so I endeavor to provide evidence as to how tonality is present in the compositions performed on the album.

I have chosen these works because Ursula Oppens, a close and long-time friend of Tobias Picker, is a renowned concert pianist who is an avid proponent of

¹⁶ Tobias Picker. 2008. *Tobias Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano*. Edited by Ursula Oppens. New York: Schott Helicon Music Corporation.

¹⁷ Robert Carl, review of "*Picker: Keys to the City, Four Etudes for Ursula, Etc/Ursula Oppens*," *Fanfare*, May/June 2009, accessed on May 19, 2019, https://www.arkivmusic.com/classical/album.jsp?album_id=204182#review.

contemporary chamber and keyboard works. No other artist alive today has commissioned and premiered more new works for the piano that have entered the permanent repertoire. Oppens has received five Grammy nominations, including one for the album *Piano Music of our Time* featuring music from Elliott Carter, Tobias Picker, and others.¹⁸ Furthermore, Oppens performed many of the works on the album *Keys to the City – Works for Piano* at the *Atrium* in the West Village, NYC garnering the review, “These technically spiky, picturesque works suit her, and her imaginative use of the piano’s color and dynamics made a persuasive case for them.”¹⁹ The works on the album *Keys to the City – Works for Piano* form the core of Picker’s solo output for piano prior to 2008, and many are considered his most significant and artistically successful works.

¹⁸ Ursula Oppens, “Faculty Bio,” *The New School Mannes*, accessed June 5, 2019, <https://www.newschool.edu/mannes/faculty/Ursula-Oppens/>.

¹⁹ Allan Kozinn, “An Energetic Pianistic Program with Wine as Accompaniment,” *New York Times*, (May 22, 2007) p. E2, accessed June 2, 2019, *Proquest*, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/2223328280/A7CC9AD126A54B34PQ/1?accountid=14604>.

CHAPTER II

COMPOSITION TEACHERS AND INFLUENCES

As an adolescent, Picker realized a prime personality trait of his was “total irrationality.”²⁰ For this reason, he sought out teachers who encouraged extreme discipline and would discourage free self-expression. Three pillars of American rationalism became his composition teachers through the course of his educational pursuits--Charles Wuorinen, Elliott Carter, and Milton Babbitt.²¹ Picker completed a Bachelor of Music degree while studying composition with Charles Wuorinen (b. 1938), an American composer of 12-tone serialism, at the Manhattan School of Music from 1972-1976.²² In 1970 Wuorinen was the youngest American composer to win the Pulitzer Prize for his electronic work *Time's Ecomium*.²³ Wuorinen has composed numerous successful operas including his most recent based on Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain*. The Los

²⁰ Schwarz, “A Composer Freed by Opera to be Tonal and Tuneful,” p. 17.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Michael Blostein, “Artist Biography,” *All Music*, accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/charles-wuorinen-mn0000684647/biography>.

²³ Charles Wourinen, “Biography,” *Howard Stokar Management*, 2019, accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.charleswuorinen.com/biography/>.

Angeles Times noted "Wuorinen's complex score is beautifully made, excellently colored, carefully detailed and coolly descriptive."²⁴ It is no wonder why Picker chose to study composition with Wuorinen when his ultimate goal from childhood was to one day write opera. During his course of studies with Wuorinen, Picker fortuitously met Ursula Oppens for the first time in 1974. He turned pages for her as she and Frederic Rzewski performed Schoenberg's *Kammersinfoni Op. 38b* on a concert of the *Group for Contemporary Music*.²⁵

Another pillar of American rationalism with whom Picker studied graduate composition at The Juilliard School from 1976 to 1978 was Elliott Carter (1908 - 2012.)²⁶ Carter, born in New York City, was encouraged by his friend and mentor, Charles Ives, to embark on a career in classical music.²⁷ During Carter's career of seventy-five years he composed 150 works ranging from chamber music to orchestral works and opera, many laced with wit and humor. After World War II Carter began to develop his signature rhythmic language, a device that was created first by the American-born composer Conlon Nancarrow,²⁸

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Broadening Knowledge: An Interview with Ursula Oppens." *American Music Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2008, 7, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=3&sid=6c54a3c8-bcf5-4a7a-b854-c00636daeb5e%40sessionmgr4007&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=39237418>.

²⁶ Picker, "Tobias Picker Bio," <http://tobiaspicker.com/bio/>.

²⁷ Elliott Carter, "Biography," The Amphion Foundation, Inc., 2015-2019, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://www.elliottcarter.com/biography/>.

²⁸ Picker, Tobias 2019. Interview by Amy Harris. Phone call. July 21.

called “metric modulation.” Briefly defined, metric modulation is a precise and controlled method of proceeding from one metronomic speed to another.²⁹ The modulation is a ritardando or accelerando of the overall tempo throughout the piece, so the term could just as easily be called “tempo modulation.” This technique resembles a chordal modulation in tonal music in that one or more pivot measures contain elements of both tempos.³⁰ The innovative rhythmic technique culminated in Carter’s *String Quartet No. 1* (1951.) A description of the processes of metric modulation is necessary to understand what compositional techniques Tobias Picker acquired from his studies with Carter and how he used these techniques in his own compositions.

From measures 198 to 205 Carter increases the tempo by fifty percent by way of changing the metronome marking of the dotted-quarter note = 84 to the half-note = 63, and finally to the quarter-note = 189 in measure 205. To decipher the fifty percent increase in the pace of the music, one must see that in measure 198 the dotted quarter-note = 84 bpm, and the dotted quarter is made of three eighth-notes. By multiplying 84 times 3 one finds that the metronome marking per eighth-note = 252, and so the metronome marking of the quarter-note = 126 bpm, the value of two eighth-notes, is found by dividing 252 by 2. In measure

²⁹ George Peter Tingley, “Metric Modulation and Elliott Carter’s ‘First String Quartet,’” *Indiana Theory Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (SPRING, 1981), accessed on June 6, 2019, 3 – 11, JSTOR, https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/stable/pdf/24045947.pdf?ab_segments=0%252Fdefault-2%252Fcontrol&refreqid=excelsior%3Aaa0518cb5f9159bc512e80fe4355324c.

³⁰ Stefan Kostka, “Materials and Techniques of Twentieth Century Music,” *University of Texas at Austin*, 2nd Edition, (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458, 1999), p. 128.

200 Carter marks that the quarter-note = the quarter-note at 126 bpm, so the half-note (126 divided by 2) = 63 beats per minute. Finally, in measure 205 Carter changes the tempo to the quarter-note = 189, and states that the half-note = the dotted half-note, so 63 bpm. 63 multiplied by 3 quarter-notes equals 189, so the overall tempo change of the dotted quarter-note = 84 bpm to the quarter-note = 189 results in a fifty-percent increase in tempo, or a relationship of 2:1 from measures 198 to 205. This relationship in tempos is found by dividing the difference between the final tempo of quarter-note = 189 and the original tempo of quarter-note = 126, and then dividing the difference by the original tempo. Thus $189 - 126 = 63$ and $63 / 126 = .5$, or 50%.

In reference to Carter's "wit, humor, anger, lyricism, and beauty," the critic Andrew Porter labeled the composer "America's great musical poet."³¹ In 1960 Carter won the Pulitzer Prize for his *String Quartet No. 2* and again in 1973 for his *String Quartet No. 3*.³² Carter's piano music spans six decades, and the piece *Night Fantasies*, premiered in 1980 and dedicated to Ursula Oppens and the three other pianists who commissioned the work, is often considered his "magnum Opus for piano."³³ Further in this paper I will discuss an early piano work by Tobias Picker that reflects the style of Carter's *Night Fantasies*. Another

³¹ Kathleen Kuiper, "Elliott Carter: American Composer," Encyclopaedia Britannica, December 7, 2018, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elliott-Carter>.

³² Carter, "Biography," <https://www.elliottcarter.com/biography/>.

³³ Jerry Kuderna, "In the Sound Fields of Elliott Carter" San Francisco Classical Voice, December 2, 2008, accessed June 5, 2019, <https://www.sfcv.org/content/sound-fields-elliott-carter>.

interest of Elliott Carter's was composing pieces based on literature, setting texts by E. E. Cummings, Robert Frost, T.S. Elliot, and other acclaimed American poets. Picker followed in the same path by incorporating texts into some of his pieces for piano and other genres.

Picker began further graduate studies in composition with Milton Babbitt (1916-2011) at Princeton University beginning in 1978.³⁴ Babbitt, another pillar of American rational modernist music, received all of his education in the United States, including mathematics and music, and he taught both subjects at Princeton from 1938 to 1984. He also joined the faculty of The Juilliard School in 1971. Babbitt furthered 12-tone composition in the U.S. through analyzing the characteristics of the 12-tone row as mathematical sets. Babbitt is known as a composer of total serialism in that he serializes all aspects of the music. Not only are the twelve pitches of the chromatic scale treated serially, but so are the dynamics, duration, timbre, and register.³⁵ In his *Three Compositions for Piano* (1947) Babbitt subjected both pitch and duration to serial methods for the first time, preceding similar experiments by Boulez and Stockhausen.³⁶ In *Piece No. 1*, Babbitt serialized the dynamics by associating a particular dynamic level with each row form. He even proceeded to serialize the duration of notes by

³⁴ Picker, "Tobias Picker Bio," <http://tobiaspicker.com/bio/>.

³⁵ Milton Babbitt, "Milton Babbitt: American Composer," Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed May 8, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Milton-Babbitt>.

³⁶ Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music* (New York and London: Norton and Company Inc., 2001), p. 769.

organizing the rhythm of the composition around the numerical series 5-1-4-2 which sums up to 12.³⁷

Before beginning his career in musical composition, Babbitt learned to play the violin as a young child and later learned to play the piano, clarinet, and saxophone. His musical interests included jazz and pop music. His interest in electronic music earned him the Directorship of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. In 1982 Babbitt received a lifetime Pulitzer Prize in composition.³⁸

As a teacher of composition, Babbitt does not seem to have instilled the same rational, mathematical, and serial principles in his students as he did in himself. Babbitt's former student Kati Agócs stated in an interview, "When I came in wanting to study serial methods, he didn't want to teach me about serialism. He said, 'It would be like leading my granddaughter astray.'" Agócs went on to say her lessons with Babbitt empowered her to forge her own language and techniques with musicality as the most important value.³⁹

Tobias Picker must have been encouraged by Babbitt in a similar manner as Agócs for, after seeking out these three teachers of American modernist

³⁷ Stefan Kostka, "Materials and Techniques of Twentieth Century Music," pp. 262-263.

³⁸ Babbitt, "Milton Babbitt: American Composer," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Milton-Babbitt>.

³⁹ William Robin, "Making Milton Babbitt's Legacy Less Fearsome," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2016, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/arts/music/making-milton-babbitts-legacy-less-fearsome.html>.

composition who encouraged extreme discipline and rationalism, Picker completed his studies in composition and states the reasons why he chose to abandon 12-tone serialism in large part in his own works.

I admired their music so much. When I was 17 years old, I thought Wuorinen was the greatest thing since discovering Beethoven. But I never wanted just to imitate my teachers. The uptown school was dominant, but I was never really a 12-tone composer. I could derive descendants from a tone row so that even my most severe early works were full of tonality. I broke every rule in the book. Over time my music has moved to where I feel it should be at any given moment.⁴⁰

Picker goes on to claim the following regarding the works in his *Collected Works for Solo Piano*.

My music may seem to inhabit the interstices between what sounds like atonality and tonality. But, in fact, all of it is tonal. Always. Even when twelve-tone – it is tonal. Sometimes the key signature never changes as in *Old and Lost Rivers* and *Where the Rivers Go*. But usually – as in most of the music in this collection – the keys change rapidly. Sometimes I have not employed key signatures. I have left the keys for you to discover.⁴¹

⁴⁰ George Loomis, "How to Set America to Music Interview Tobias Picker: London 1st Edition," *Financial Times*, London (UK) (December 2, 2005) p. 15, accessed June 7, 2019, ProQuest, <https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/249763429?accountid=14604>.

⁴¹ Picker. *Tobias Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano*, p. 4.

CHAPTER III

WHEN SOFT VOICES DIE AND KEYS TO THE CITY

I would like to discuss Tobias Picker's piano works on the album *Keys to the City: Works for Piano* as they were composed chronologically to hopefully convey a path of growth and maturity in his piano compositions over the years. Picker composed *When Soft Voices Die* in 1977 and dedicated the work to Ursula Oppens. The title comes from the following poem by Percy Bysshe Shelly:

*Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory -
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.*

*Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap'd for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.⁴²*

When Soft Voices Die is in one continuous movement lasting approximately fifteen minutes. This work is full of rich jazz chords and free improvisation similar to the free jazz pioneered by the American pianist and poet

⁴² Picker. "Tobias Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano," p. 3.

Cecil Taylor (1929-2018.)⁴³ Picker describes it as music of “highly compressed hyper-romanticism.”⁴⁴ The piece is a tone poem on Picker’s Tourette’s Syndrome, and the music gives the listener an idea and entry into the expressive world of Tourette’s as Picker has depicted in his composition. The work is also a prime example of the important scholarly effort known as “Disability Studies in Music.”^{45,46}

Although an impressive product from a 23-year-old composer, *When Soft Voices Die* has been criticized for its constant stopping and starting.⁴⁷ However, since the composer has described the piece as a tone poem on his Tourette’s Syndrome, the jerky rhythms and constantly changing meters seem to aptly draw an analogy to the involuntary and uncontrollable movements, unexpected jerky motions, and non-specific verbalizations that are symptoms of Tourette’s.

Picker composed *When Soft Voices Die* while studying with Elliott Carter, and another criticism of the work is that it seems too influenced by Carter’s

⁴³ Allen Gimbel, “Picker: Piano Pieces,” *American Record Guide* 72, no. 1 (January 2009): 132, accessed April 17, 2019, *ProQuest*, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/223350032/35D2850B4929461EPQ/1?accountid=14604>.

⁴⁴ Picker, “*Tobias Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano*,” p. 3.

⁴⁵ Gimbel, “Picker: Piano Pieces,” <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/223350032/35D2850B4929461EPQ/1?accountid=14604>.

⁴⁶ Readers interested in this topic may wish to read the essay collection “Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music,” Ed. Neil Lerner and Joseph N. Straus, Routledge.

⁴⁷ Robert Carl, “Picker: Keys to the City, Four Etudes for Ursula, Etc/Ursula Oppens,” *Fanfare*, (May/June 2009): p. 206, https://www.arkivmusic.com/classical/album.jsp?album_id=204182#review.

mammoth piano piece, *Night Fantasies* (1980).⁴⁸ Reasons for this comparison could be the extreme contrasts in dynamics and register and the liberal use of metric modulation in both compositions. Picker's piece premiered on February 25, 1978, two years earlier than the premiere of Carter's *Night Fantasies*. Both composers' works were performed by Ursula Oppens at their premieres. Tobias Picker stated that Carter gave him very minimal feedback as he was composing *When Soft Voices Die*,⁴⁹ so considering that Picker's composition was completed and premiered before Carter's, I believe the experienced educator and composer may have been more influenced by the talented 23-year-old musician and composer than the other way around.

The opening tempo, marked *Maestoso*, is the quarter-note = 88 bpm (Example 1).

Example 1. *When Soft Voices Die*, mm. 1-2

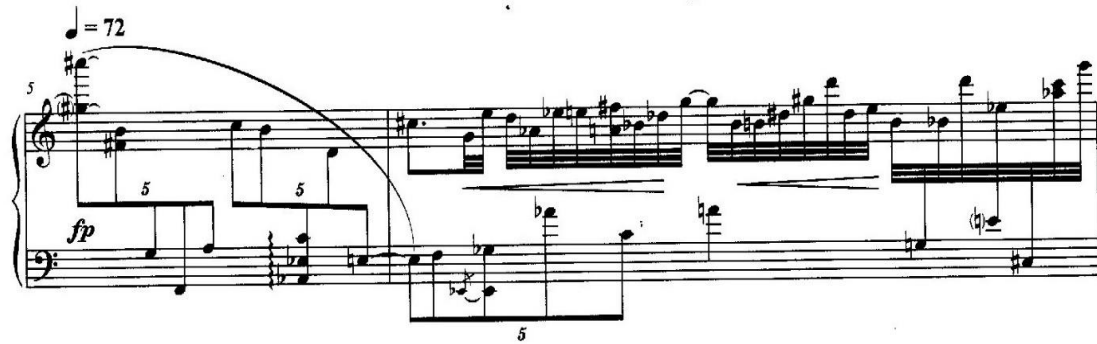


⁴⁸ Carl, "Picker: Keys to the City, Four Etudes for Ursula, Etc/Ursula Oppens," p. 206.

⁴⁹ Picker, Interview by Amy Harris, 2019.

The tempo is 18% slower at measure 5 where the quarter-note = 72 bpm
(Example 2).

Example 2. *When Soft Voices Die*, mm. 5-6



The tempo holds steady disregarding a *poco ritard*. At measure 17 until the measure of metric transition at 48 (Example 3). The meter $7/8$. Appears at the beginning of measure 48. Picker includes nothing but dotted 32nd-notes in measure 48, and two of these fit into one dotted sixteenth-note. At measure 49 the former dotted sixteenth-note = the eighth-note at 192 bpm. Divide 192 by two and the result is that the new quarter-note = 96 bpm. Subtract the tempo of the quarter-note = 72 bpm at measure 48 from the new tempo of quarter-note = 96 at measure 49. Divide the result of 24 by the tempo in measure 48 of 72 bpm to find that there is a 33% increase in tempo in measure 49 from measure 48.

$$(\text{♩}) 192 \div 2 = (\text{♩}) 96$$

$$(\text{♩}) 96 - (\text{♩}) 72 = 24$$

$$24 \div 72 = .33$$

m. 49 = 33% increase in tempo

Another ratio to discover the same percentage of increase is three 32nd-notes equal one dotted sixteenth-note, and four 32nd-notes equal one dotted eighth note. Since both the dotted sixteenth-note and the eighth-note = 192, then the ratio of three 32nd-notes to four 32nd-notes per beat results in a 33% increase in tempo.⁵⁰

Example 3. When Soft Voices Die, mm. 48-50

⁵⁰ Picker, "Tobias Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano," pp. 37-41.

Measure 51 (*Example 4*) is another measure of transition, and the prevailing note values in the left hand are sixteenth-notes in 6/8 time. Between measures 51 and 52 the dotted quarter-note = the quarter-note at 64 bpm. The tempo of 96 quarter-notes per minute has decreased by 33% in measure 52 so that the tempo is now 64 bpm. Another route to discovering the resulting decrease in tempo is to compare the ratio of six sixteenth-notes per dotted quarter-note to four sixteenth-notes per quarter-note, or 3:2. The tempo of 64 bpm in measure 52 is approximately 66% of the tempo of 96 bpm in measure 49, or 33% slower.⁵¹

Example 4. When Soft Voices Die, mm. 51-55

The musical score for 'When Soft Voices Die' measures 51-55 is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 51 and 52, and the second system covers measures 53 and 54. The score is in 6/8 time. Measure 51 is marked with a tempo of 5:6 and a dynamic of *mf sub.* Measure 52 is marked with a tempo of 5:6 and a dynamic of *p sub.* A box above measure 52 indicates a tempo change to 64 bpm. Measure 53 is marked with a tempo of 88 and a dynamic of *mp*. Measure 54 is marked with a dynamic of *p sub.* Measure 55 is marked with a dynamic of *mp*. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and accents.

⁵¹ Picker, "Tobias Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano," p. 41.

Regardless of the similarities between Picker's *When Soft Voices Die* and Carter's piece *Night Fantasies*, the notes themselves and the overall mood of each piece contrast from each other enough that I do not consider Picker's piece too influenced by his teacher's music. I feel that despite Carter's direction, Tobias Picker created a work of art at the age of twenty-three so powerful and forward-thinking that it could stand alongside his master's.

Keys to the City

The next large work I would like to discuss by Picker, completed in 1983, is his *Piano Concerto No. 2: Keys to the City*. The version of the concerto recorded on the album *Keys to the City* is for two-pianos, but the score to the concerto does not appear in *Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano* in any version. The versions for piano and orchestra, piano and chamber ensemble, and for two pianos can be found at en.schott-music.com.⁵²

In September of 1982 Picker received a call from The Brooklyn Bridge Centennial Commission. They asked if he would like to submit a musical work to be considered for a commission to compose a piece that would be performed at the centennial celebration ceremony of the Brooklyn Bridge's opening. After some deliberation considering he may not have a chance at winning the commission since many older and more distinguished composers would also be

⁵² Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG Weihergarten 5 55116, https://en.schott-music.com/shop/shopsearch/result/?search_categories=&search=&q=Tobias+Picker+Keys+to+the+City+two+pianos+.

competing, Picker decided to submit a previously composed work. Three weeks later he got a call from those on the Commission saying that they had selected Picker to compose a work for the celebration.⁵³ He was commissioned to write a piece in whatever medium he chose, and the result is the *Piano Concerto No. 2* inspired by George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.⁵⁴

Picker spent a great deal of time visiting the bridge to get a feel for the sights and sounds he wanted to portray in his eighteen-minute one-movement concerto. The intervallic structure of the work is derived from the form of the bridge itself, and the intervals include a series of interlocking 12-tone rows based on the bridge's arches and curves. The collection of interrelated and connected episodes suggests the bridge in various tones from dusk to dawn.⁵⁵

Various reviews exist of *Keys to the City*, and like all reviews, you may read them, ponder them, and then listen to the music yourself and decide what the piece means to you. The music critic Robert Dietz said, "besides it being sparkling, brash, rhythmically vital, slick, and occasionally sounding like jazzy passages of Bernstein's *Age of Anxiety*, it is charming, entertaining, witty, even wry in its humor. [However,] because it invites programmatic interpretation, I

⁵³ Andy Warhol was commissioned by the city of New York to create the artwork for the Brooklyn Bridge Centennial Celebration. Warhol's poster appears on the jacket cover of the CD "Keys to the City: The Brooklyn Philharmonic."

⁵⁴ Tobias Picker, "Program Notes: Keys to the City (Piano Concerto No. 2)," May 9, 2016, accessed April 17, 2019, <http://tobiaspicker.com/portfolio/keys-to-the-city-2/>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

must confess to imagining it as an elegant score for a Woody Allen *Manhattan* II.”⁵⁶ I have accepted Mr. Dietz’ rhetorical invitation to add my own program notes as they give me different characters and themes to listen for in what could otherwise come across as a disorganized array of notes and sounds.

Keys to the City opens in the key region of B, a key that Picker associates with darkness.⁵⁷ The opening theme, played tutti without the piano, consists of the notes B, C#, E, C#, E♭, and D (*Example 5*).

⁵⁶ Robert J. Dietz, “Record Reviews: Keys to the City by Tobias Picker: Piano Concerto by Marc Blitzstein,” *American Music*, 8, no. 3 (Autumn, 1990): 381-382, accessed May 19, 2019, ProQuest, https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/stable/pdf/3052110.pdf?ab_segments=0%252Fdefault-2%252Fcontrol&refreqid=excelsior%3A93fbd4fcda53765ba00194a5d02de56e.

⁵⁷ Picker, “Program Notes: Keys to the City,” <http://tobiaspicker.com/portfolio/keys-to-the-city-2/>.

Example 5. Keys to the City, mm. 1-4

Piano Concerto No. 2
For the centenary of the Brooklyn Bridge

Tobias Picker
(1983)

$\text{♩} = 91$

Piccolo (Flute 2)

Flute

Oboes 1, 2

Clars. 1, 2

Bassoon 1

Contrab. (Bassoon 2)

Horns 1, 3

Horns 2, 4

Tpts. 1, 2

Trbs. 1, 2

Bass Trb./Tuba

Cymbals (s)

Percussion Timpani

Piano solo

$\text{♩} = 91$

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

I envision the sun rising above the Brooklyn Bridge at the solo piano's entrance at measure 15 (*Example 6*) and the peaceful calm of twilight played by the pianist at measure 60 (*Example 7*).

Example 6. Keys to the City, mm.15-17

The image displays a musical score for measures 15 through 17 of the piece 'Keys to the City'. The score is written for Piano (Pno.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), and Viola (Vla.). The Piano part begins with a forte (f) dynamic and features a complex, arpeggiated figure in the right hand, with a circled measure 15 marked with a '2a' and a '5' indicating a second ending or a specific fingering. The Violin I and II parts enter in measure 15 with a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic, playing a melodic line that moves from a half note to a quarter note. The Viola part also enters in measure 15 with a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic, playing a similar melodic line. The score includes a 'Rit.' (Ritardando) marking and a tempo indication of '♩ = 72' (quarter note equals 72 beats per minute). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D-flat minor), and the time signature is 4/4.

Example 7. *Keys to the City*, mm. 60-61

60

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Vibes

P.

60

As in Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, cars rush over the bridge during midday traffic starting at measure 127 (*Example 8*) and honking horns are depicted in measures 140 and 141 through the addition of unexpected accents (*Example 9*).

Example 8. Keys to the City, mm.127 – 130

The musical score is for the piece "Keys to the City" (mm. 127-130). It is marked "Doppio movimento (♩=96)". The score is written for Piano (Pno.), Violins I and II (Vln. I, Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). The Piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The strings play a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The woodwinds (Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., Cb.) play a melodic line with triplets and sixteenth notes. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *pp* (pianissimo), and articulation markings like *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *come arpa* (like an arpeggio). The tempo is indicated as "Doppio movimento (♩=96)".

Example 9. *Keys to the City*, mm.139-142

The image displays a musical score for measures 139 through 142 of the piece 'Keys to the City'. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system covers measures 139 and 140, while the second system covers measures 141 and 142. The instruments listed on the left are Piano (Pno.), Violin I (I./ln.), Violin II (II.), Viola (Vi.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). In measure 139, the Piano part features a circled chord. Measures 141 and 142 show a change in the Piano part, with a circled chord in measure 141 and a more complex, arpeggiated figure in measure 142. The Violin I and II parts are marked *ppp* (pianissimo) in measure 140. The Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso parts play a steady, rhythmic accompaniment throughout the measures. The score concludes with a double bar line and a 6/4 time signature in measure 142.

A moment of calm begins in measure 160 (*Example 10*) before the storm of rush hour at measure 179 (*Example 11*), sounding much like the midday traffic at measure 124.

il $\text{♩} = 60$
tranquillo

A handwritten musical score on ten staves. The first staff has a tempo marking 'il' and a metronome marking '♩ = 60'. The second staff has the word 'tranquillo' written in a cursive hand. The music is written in treble and bass clefs, with various notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano). The notation is somewhat sketchy and appears to be a personal or working draft.

[illegible]

I conjure up the chaos of motorists mixing with bicyclists and pedestrians at measure 189 (*Example 12*), until a sense of order returns in measure 207 (*Example 13*) with a steady pulse of quarter-notes in 4/4 time.

Example 12. Keys to the City, mm.189-192 Example 13. Keys to the City, mm. 206-207

The image displays two pages of a musical score for the piece 'Keys to the City'. The left page covers measures 189 to 192, and the right page covers measures 206 to 207. The score is written for a large ensemble, including Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba/Euphonium, Percussion, and strings. The music is in 4/4 time and features a steady pulse of quarter notes. The notation includes various dynamics (p, f, mf, sf) and articulation marks. The right page also includes a tempo marking of 108 beats per minute.

At measure 254 (*Example 14*) a clamor of hammers and nails rings out as the bridge inevitably needs repairs from time to time, and the same theme that was heard in measure 1 returns at measure 258 (*Example 15*), this time in the form of a ground bass bringing in a 20-measure boogie-woogie cadenza starting at measure 268 (*Example 16*).

Example 14. Keys to the City, mm. 254-255

Senza sord.

Pps.

Fbs.

Tuba

Bass drum

P.

(12)

254 J=120

Example 15. Keys to the City, mm. 256-258

This musical score is for the final measures of the piece 'Keys to the City'. It features a piano (Pno.) and a string section (Violins I and II, Violas, Cellos, and Double Basses). The piano part is in 3/4 time and features a complex, chromatic melody. The string section consists of five staves. Violins I and II are in treble clef, Viola is in alto clef, and Cello and Double Bass are in bass clef. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* (pianissimo), *molto*, *sfz* (sforzando), and *ff* (fortissimo). The tempo is marked *molto*. The key signature is B-flat major. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure is marked with a circled '256'. The second measure is marked with a circled '257'. The third measure is marked with a circled '258'. The piano part has a complex, chromatic melody. The string section has a sustained, harmonic accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and articulation marks.

Pno.

256

I

Vln. II

3

4

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

pp

molto

sfz

ff

pizz.

Example 16. *Keys to the City*, mm. 268-287

Alto sax.

268

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

gloss

The piano solo continues playing the bass line throughout the cadenza, and the entire ensemble performs in a raucous boogie-style until measure 312 (*Example 17*) when the sound and texture evoke the pulsing of cars cruising steadily over the East River. A burst of traffic seems to erupt at measure 325 (*Example 18*) simply to bring traffic to a mundane stand-still at measures 330 and 331 (*Example 19*).

Example 17. Keys to the City, mm. 312-313

(312) ♩ = 96

Perc.
Fl.
Obs.
S.
Sax
A.
Bsn.
Hns.
Trps.
Trbn.
B.T.
Tuba
Perc.
Pno.

Example 18. Keys to the City, mm. 324-328

The musical score for 'Keys to the City' measures 324-328 is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is for Percussion (Perc.), followed by Piano (Pno.), Cello (C.), Double Bass (B.), Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), and Violins I and II (Vn. I, Vn. II). The score includes measures 324 and 326, which are circled. The Piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with a large slur over measures 324-326. The Percussion part has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The Cello and Double Bass parts have dynamic markings of *pp*. The Flute part has a dynamic marking of *p*. The Clarinet and Bassoon parts have dynamic markings of *pp*. The Violins I and II parts have dynamic markings of *pizz.* and *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 19. *Keys to the City*, mm. 329-331

The musical score for Example 19, *Keys to the City*, measures 329-331, is presented in a multi-staff format. The staves are labeled as follows:

- B.T.** (Bass Trombone): Measures 329-331.
- Tuba**: Measures 329-331.
- Perc.** (Percussion): Measures 329-331, including Tān-tān and Bass drum.
- Pro.** (Piano): Measures 329-331, featuring a modulation to 5/4 time and a section marked 'gliss.'
- I. Vln.** (Violin I): Measures 329-331.
- II. Vln.** (Violin II): Measures 329-331.
- Vla.** (Viola): Measures 329-331, including a section marked 'a sord.'
- Vc.** (Violoncello): Measures 329-331, including a section marked 'a sord.'

The score includes a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 72-84$ and a measure number of 329. The percussion section includes Tān-tān and Bass drum. The piano part features a modulation to 5/4 time and a section marked 'gliss.'

In measure 355 Picker begins a modulation to the key center of B \flat (*Example 20*), and a reference to the end of the short cadenza of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* that ushers in the Andantino moderato section appears at measure 373 (*Example 21*). This brings the piece to a dramatic coda with the sounds of hammers and anvils produced in the lowest register of the piano accompanied by the bass drum and rumbling timpani (*Example 22*). It is followed by a sustained

cluster chord with the piano playing the lowest A on the instrument (*Example 23*). The theme from the first measure appears transposed up a half step in measure 378 and ends with a flourish in B \flat , a key Picker associates with light (*Example 23*).⁵⁸ The concerto traverses through many different keys as it progresses, but the perceived ultimate goal is to take the listener from darkness into the light.

⁵⁸ Tobias Picker, 1983. "*Keys to the City, Piano Concerto No. 2: Brooklyn Bridge Centennial Celebration 1883-1983*," *Helicon Music Corp*.

Example 20. Keys to the City, mm. 353-355

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system includes Percussion (Perc.), Piano (Pno.), and Bass Drum. The second system includes a circled measure number '353' and a detailed view of the piano part in 3/4 time. The third system includes a solo violin (Vln. I) and other strings (Vln. II, Vla., Vc., Cb.).

System 1:

- Perc.**: Crash cymbals (f), Bass Drum (pp).
- Pno.**: Piano part with a 3/4 time signature and a circled measure number '353'. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed sixteenth notes.

System 2:

- 353**: A circled measure number indicating the start of the third system.
- Pno.**: A detailed view of the piano part in 3/4 time, showing a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed sixteenth notes.

System 3:

- Violins**: Vln. I (solo) and Vln. II (arco). Vln. I has markings for 'arco', 'div.', and 'f non div.'. Vln. II has markings for 'arco' and 'f'.
- Other Strings**: Vla., Vc., and Cb. (all marked 'f').
- Pizzicato**: The strings play a pizzicato (pizz.) pattern, marked with 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte).

Example 21. Keys to the City, m. 373

Pno.

373

Rall. - - -

Example 22. Keys to the City, mm. 374-376

Perc.

(Tam) (B. Dr.)

Hammers and Anvils

Pno.

374

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Uk.

Cb.

arco

non div.

arco

non div.

Example 23. *Keys to the City*, mm. 377-379

The image shows a page of a musical score for 'Keys to the City' (mm. 377-379). The score is written for Percussion (Perc.), Piano (Pno.), Violins I and II (Vln. I, Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Double Bass (Vc. and Cb.). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The tempo is marked as 120. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *p*, *sfz*, and *mf*. A red box highlights a passage in the Piano part, and another red box highlights a passage in the Violin I and II parts. The score is numbered 377, 378, and 379.

Based on Picker's account of the Centennial Celebration of the Brooklyn Bridge on May 24, 1983, the festivities left much to be desired. The performance of his second piano concerto was held on Fulton Ferry Landing under the Brooklyn Bridge. A display of fireworks larger than any to that point was to bring spectators from miles away. Boats filled the East River as people aboard gathered to hear the music and see the festivities. However, no shell covered the musicians, so the sound of the brass and orchestra wafted away into the night air, not to mention Picker's sheet music as he turned the pages. He

remembers not even being able to hear the large brass section behind him as he was playing the solo part because photographers from at least twenty-seven different countries who came in for the spectacle sat in front of the orchestra and drowned out their sound with the constant flashes of bulbs. Regardless of the premiere being a disappointment for Picker, he composed *Keys to the City* in honor of the people who lived and died while building the bridge and in recognition of the artwork it has inspired over the last 100 years and counting.⁵⁹

A review by critic Robert Carl states that *Keys to the City* is an effective showpiece that uses the 12-tone technique. It doesn't have the same sorts of immediately memorable gestures and tunes as one hears in Gershwin's *Concerto in F*, for example,⁶⁰ but after listening to the piece performed by Picker and orchestra as well as the two-piano version performed by Picker and Oppens a few times, more and more familiar patterns and gestures emerge. Music critic Bret Johnson states that *Keys* harkens back to the mechanical jazz age of George Antheil and George Gershwin, and the music is strongly anchored in tonality. This review seems to support Picker's claim that the arrangement of pitch classes in his 12-tone rows lends itself toward tonal voice leading.⁶¹ *Keys* is also nostalgic in a way that Gershwin and Antheil could never be because their

⁵⁹ Tobias Picker, "Program Notes: Keys to the City," <http://tobiaspicker.com/portfolio/keys-to-the-city-2/>.

⁶⁰ Carl, "Picker: Keys to the City, Four Etudes for Ursula, Etc/Ursula Oppens," p. 206.

⁶¹ Picker. "*Collected Works for Solo Piano*," p. 4.

music lived for the present and looked forward to the future,⁶² whereas Picker's *Second Piano Concerto* celebrated the workmanship of the past. Critic Allen Gimbel calls *Keys to the City* "a series of connected vignettes in various quasi-jazz styles overlaid with improvisational [Charles] Ivesian noodlings that give the work an urban flavor."⁶³

⁶² Bret Johnson, "Keys to the City Review," *Tempo*, Vol. 57, No. 225 (July 2003) pp. 57-58, accessed on April 26, 2019, *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3878971>.

⁶³ Gimbel, "Picker: Piano Pieces," p. 132.

CHAPTER IV
OLD AND LOST RIVERS AND THREE PIECES FOR PIANO

Picker composed *Old and Lost Rivers* in 1986 and dedicated the work to Ursula Oppens to whom he gave the first copy as a surprise birthday gift. *Old and Lost Rivers* was the first solo piano piece he composed since *When Soft Voices Die* in 1977. Picker was inspired by an encounter with the Trinity River in the bayous of Louisiana, and he named the piece after the haunting road sign within the vicinity that was emblazoned with the piece's title. The roughly five-minute work is in the key of D \flat , and it is creative in its use of jazz influences.⁶⁴

As a young man, Picker learned a great deal as he improvised at the piano for Martha Graham's dance classes, and *Old and Lost Rivers* was conceived as a result of these experiences with improvisation.⁶⁵ Picker recorded his five-minute improvisation and realized he had a complete work on his hands. He wrote the piece for piano solo, and then quickly transcribed the piece for the Houston Symphony Orchestra who premiered it in 1986 during Picker's residency with the H.S.O.⁶⁶ The work has become what the composer himself

⁶⁴ Gimbel, "Picker: Piano Pieces," p. 32.

⁶⁵ Kellow, "The Key to Tobias," p. 20.

⁶⁶ Ibid

calls his *Scheherazade*.⁶⁷ Others have referred to *Old and Lost Rivers* as Picker's *Prelude in C# Minor* because, just as Rachmaninoff wanted to play a variety of pieces for his audiences but was always asked to play his *Prelude in C# Minor*, people frequently wish to hear Picker's *Old and Lost Rivers* even when he would rather play something else.⁶⁸

Old and Lost Rivers is tonal and romantic in sound and spirit.⁶⁹ The overall character of the work is surging and lugubrious as the pitches span the lowest to highest registers of the keyboard (*Example 24*).

⁶⁷ Peter Goodman, "Rivers' Flows with Copland Influence," *Newsday*, Combined editions, (Long Island, NY) 103 (January 21, 1993), accessed May 23, 2019, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/278591330/23264E8D324AA8PQ/2?accountid=14604>.

⁶⁸ Picker, "Meet the Composer," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3g0xinPRT6A>.

⁶⁹ Carl, "Picker: Keys to the City, Four Etudes for Ursula, Etc/Ursula Oppens," p. 206.

Example 24. *Old and Lost Rivers*, mm. 1-5

Tranquillo e rubato
(♩ = 36 - 76)

pp

pp

loco

rall.

a tempo

Old and Lost Rivers is composed in a populist, or deliberately accessible style as were many of the works of American composer Aaron Copland. In fact, many of the harmonies and patterns in Copland's *Appalachian Spring* inspired the framework for *Old and Lost Rivers*. Interestingly, Martha Graham was the dedicatee of *Appalachian Spring*.^{70,71} Picker's piece is artful and skillfully written;

⁷⁰ Elliott Jones, "20th Century: Introduction to Primitivism, Nationalism, and Neoclassicism,"
Provided by: Santa Ana College. **Located at:** <http://www.sac.edu>. **License:** CC BY: Attribution,
 accessed on June 14, 2019, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/musicapp-medieval-modern/chapter/aaron-copland/>.

⁷¹ Copland never named the ballet music, which was commissioned by Martha Graham (1894 - 1991) *Appalachian Spring*. Graham asked Copland to write music for an American ballet, so he included music that reflected her unique choreographic style. Copland borrowed the sounds of Shaker songs and dances and directly quoted *Simple Gifts* in his ballet music. He called the

however its aimless structure with no overall pattern led to a critique of the piece as “high-quality background music.”⁷² In my opinion, its aimless structure and fluid pattern of sinuous eighth notes vividly depict the rivers, tributaries, and backwaters carving paths through the earth over vast expanses of time. Just as the flow of the river may be unhurried at one point and rushed at another, so too does the phrasing require much use of rubato. At points in the score the rivers converge as more voices enter the aural space, and they part ways at the end of the piece as is characteristic of a bayou.

Three Pieces for Piano

Picker’s next set of pieces for solo piano is titled *Three Pieces for Piano*, composed in 1988 for Peter Serkin. The American concert pianist, born in 1947, won a Grammy Award in 1966 at the age of 19 for “Best New Classical Artist, Most Promising New Classical Recording Artist.” Later, Serkin commissioned eleven American composers, including Luciano Berio, Leon Kirchner, Toru Takemitsu, and Tobias Picker,⁷³ to write one six-minute long piece each to be

commission *Ballet for Martha*, which she later titled *Appalachian Spring* from a poem by Hart Crane. Copland was not aware of the now universally known title until the music had become a huge success immediately after the ballet’s premiere. The “spring” in *Appalachian Spring* has to do with a spring of water rather than the season.

⁷² Goodman, “Rivers’ Flows with Copland Influence,”
<https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/278591330/23264E8D324AA8PQ/2?accountid=14604>.

⁷³ Lesley Valdes, “A Concerted Performance: Peter Serkin Will Play Works He Coaxed Out of 11 Contemporary Composers.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan 07, 1990, accessed on June 16, 2019, *ProQuest*,
<https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1834849151?accountid=14604>.

performed at concerts of new American music around the country. The composers, who received the fee of \$5,000.00 for their compositions,^{74, 75} were given one to two years to complete their works. Not a single composer met Serkin's requested deadline of October 1988. Serkin still managed to pull off the premiere performance to enthusiastic acclaim on November 12, 1989 at the 92nd Street Y in New York.⁷⁶

No piece on the program was simplistic in compositional style, and all pieces had Serkin's abilities in mind to some extent. He has very large hands and incredible technique, so several of the composers whose primary instrument is piano revealed they had difficulty playing their own compositions. Serkin handled the pieces with relative ease.⁷⁷

Picker describes the construct of *Three Pieces for Piano* in the following way.

⁷⁴ Some concert attendees appreciated the fee the composers were given, saying the amount was very generous. Others thought the fee was outrageously high. The publicity of the amount of commission fees given each composer spurred discussions about how society treats composers relative to doctors, lawyers, and rock stars. Kirchner contributed to the discussion by chiming in, "Fees haven't risen like the price of theater seats. You don't compose unless you love it."

⁷⁵ Kandell, "When Does Six Minutes Add Up to Two Years?," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)*; **New York, N.Y.** November 5, 1989, A.30, accessed June 14, 2019, *ProQuest*, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/427444600/9E3097FD7A3A4455PQ/2?accountid=14604>.

⁷⁶ Lesley Valdes, "A Concerted Performance," E1.

⁷⁷ Kandell, "When Does Six Minutes Add Up to Two Years?," <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/427444600/9E3097FD7A3A4455PQ/2?accountid=14604>.

The harmonic materials of the slow piece, a multi-layered landscape, consisted of the fast pieces slowed down, magnified, and fitted together in different ways. But if the slow piece could be squeezed, at both ends would pop two very short, fast pieces which are contained in the slow piece, though not recognizable as such. I had thought of calling the pieces 'Inside Out.' The fast pieces are spotlights which throw the slow piece into relief.⁷⁸

Picker's *Three Pieces for Piano* are like extrapolations from the crossed-hand, melodic separations and busy arpeggios of Schubert's *Impromptus*.⁷⁹ Picker describes the first piece as sounding a lot like Debussy, and a little bit like Chopin. He admits that the second piece sounds like most of his slow movements, minus the quote from *Pagliacci*.⁸⁰ This second piece is an "expansive, jazzy interlude with the improvisatory feel of Keith Jarrett's excursions in the '70's. It engages and challenges the ear at the same time."⁸¹ Overall, *Three Pieces for Piano* disguises its 12-tone processes in darting passagework and allusions to French impressionism.⁸²

⁷⁸ Quoted in Maurice Hinson and Wesley Roberts, "Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire, Fourth Edition," *Indiana University Press*. (2014): 763, accessed on May 23, 2019, JSTOR, https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/stable/j.ctt16gh7zx.23?refreqid=excelsior%3A1f1d1929a642fced162ea4781929a363&seq=23#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁷⁹ Scott Duncan, "Selections are key in Oppens' 'Piano Mix'//REVIEW: The Contemporary Performer Produces a Technically Flawed but Musically Intriguing Program," *The Orange County Register*, Santa Ana, CA, (October 12, 1995): F. 05, accessed on May 31, 2019, ProQuest, <https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/272823783?accountid=14604>.

⁸⁰ Valdes, "A Concerted Performance," E1.

⁸¹ Duncan, "Selections are key in Oppens' 'Piano Mix'//REVIEW:" F. 05.

⁸² Valdes, "A Concerted Performance," E1.

After listening to much of Picker's piano music I have wrestled with making sense of the statement that "...all of it is tonal. Always. Even when twelve-tone – it is tonal."⁸³ However, Picker clarifies that when writing a 12-tone piece, he might choose a row so rich in tonal allusions that further turns toward tonality could be justified.⁸⁴ In our interview, he also stated that his use of the 12-tone row was entirely his own approach, and that he invented this form of composition by himself. It is impossible to find the original row and its permutations because he combined each permutation with counterpoint in *Three Pieces* (see *Example 26*) as well as his other 12-tone pieces *When Soft Voices Die* and *Keys to the City*.⁸⁵

Picker states that his three romantically impressionist pieces float between tonal and atonal sonorities.⁸⁶ Critic Robert Carl mentions that, although the pieces have an unclassifiable sound (the second piece is almost "a Broadway ballad that has been fractured by an explosion, and through its seven minutes we keep hearing fragments resonate as they fall to earth,")⁸⁷ Picker's *Three Pieces*

⁸³ Picker. "Collected Works for Solo Piano." p. 4.

⁸⁴ Schwarz, "A Composer Freed by Opera to be Tonal and Tuneful," p. 17.

⁸⁵ Picker, Interview by Amy Harris, 2019.

⁸⁶ Kandell, "When Does Six Minutes Add Up to Two Years?," <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/427444600/9E3097FD7A3A4455PQ/2?accountid=14604>.

⁸⁷ Carl, "Picker: Keys to the City, Four Etudes for Ursula, Etc/Ursula Oppens," p. 206.

for Piano most successfully treads the line between the modernist and Romantic aesthetics Picker values most.⁸⁸

To the composer Leon Kirchner, who also contributed a piece to Serkin's recital of new music by American composers, everything is tonal, including Schoenberg,⁸⁹ so perhaps tonality and atonality are merely determined by the ear of the listener or composer. Tobias Picker agrees with Kirchner's assessment of tonality by stating "I hear tonality in everything."⁹⁰ Another possibility to hearing Picker's compositions tonally comes through looking more deeply into the contours of the phrasing and the dynamic drive they generate rather than considering the melody and harmony alone.

Liam Cagney states that *Three Pieces for Piano* is in arch form,⁹¹ and Allen Gimbel describes the work as a whole as two brief athletic etudes surrounding a sultry, meandering improvisation.⁹² The pieces are marked *Svelto* (quick and brisk), *Liberamente* (freely), and *Feroce* (ferociously), and each piece displays pointillistic passages, wide dynamic range, changing meters, and

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Kandell, "When Does Six Minutes Add Up to Two Years?," <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/427444600/9E3097FD7A3A4455PQ/2?accountid=14604>.

⁹⁰ Picker, Interview by Amy Harris, 2019.

⁹¹ Liam Cagney, "The new source for concert and opera reviews, articles and interviews on the web: Tobias Picker: Keys to the City - works for piano solo," *MusicalCriticism.com*, accessed June 16, 2019, <http://www.musicalcriticism.com/recordings/cd-picker-keys-0109.shtml>.

⁹² Gimbel, "Guide to Records," p. 132.

broadly spread sonorities. *Liberamente* consists of two streams of dense counterpoint. These streams are depleted of rhythm and jettisoned into two rapid outer movements.⁹³ *Liberamente* is a twelve-tone version of the world of *Old and Lost Rivers*.⁹⁴

My discussion of *Three Pieces for Piano* begins with *Liberamente* because the outer pieces may be understood more clearly as they relate to it. By measure three of *Liberamente*, written entirely in common time, all 12 pitches of the chromatic scale have appeared, although not without some intervening repeated pitches (*Example 25*).

Example 25. Liberamente, mm. 1-3



The tempo ranges from 72 – 112 quarter-notes per minute. The pitch classes found in the first hexachord of *Liberamente* [2, 4, 7, 5, 10, 9] are nearly the same

⁹³ Picker. "Collected Works for Solo Piano." p. 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

pitch classes [2, 4, 7, 5, 10, 1] (*Example 26*) that open *Svelto*, and a G minor triad made of pitch classes [7, 10, and 2] can be heard easily in both sets.

Example 26. Svelto, mm. 1-3

Tobias Picker
(1990)

I

Svelto (♩ = 132)

Piano

The musical score for the beginning of *Svelto* is presented in three measures. The first measure, in 5/8 time, begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and contains the pitch class numbers 2, 4, 7, 5, 10, 1. The second measure is in 9/8 time, and the third measure is in 6/8 time, marked with a crescendo (*cresc.*). The key signature is one flat (B-flat).

Instead of staying in one meter as in *Liberamente*, Picker explores meters such as 5/8, 9/8, 6/8, 2/4, 9/16, and 7/8 in both *Feroce* and *Svelto* where the sixteenth note remains constant.

The order of pitches to begin *Feroce* does not resemble those of the first two pieces. *Feroce* does, however, begin on the same pitch as *Svelto* and *Liberamente*, the dominant of G minor (*Example 27.*)

Example 27. *Feroce*, mm. 1-3



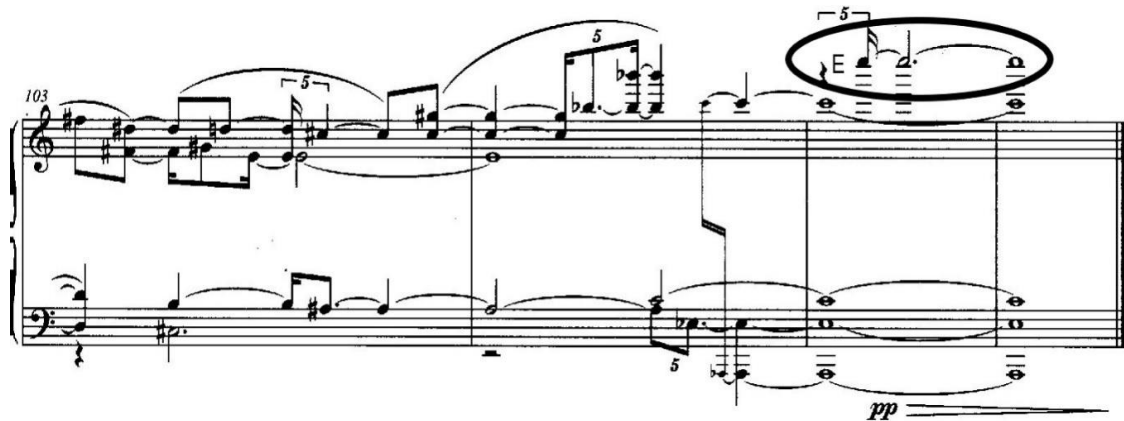
Svelto begins on pitch D, or pitch class 2, and outlines a G minor arpeggio on beats one and two in the first measure. The piece ends brusquely on an A \flat major triad that is preceded by a lingering B \flat in the treble. The role of B \flat is to resolve to the third of the A \flat chord (*Example 28*). This A \flat major triad is the Neapolitan chord, or \flat II of g minor which serves a predominant function.

Example 28. *Svelto*, mm. 31-32



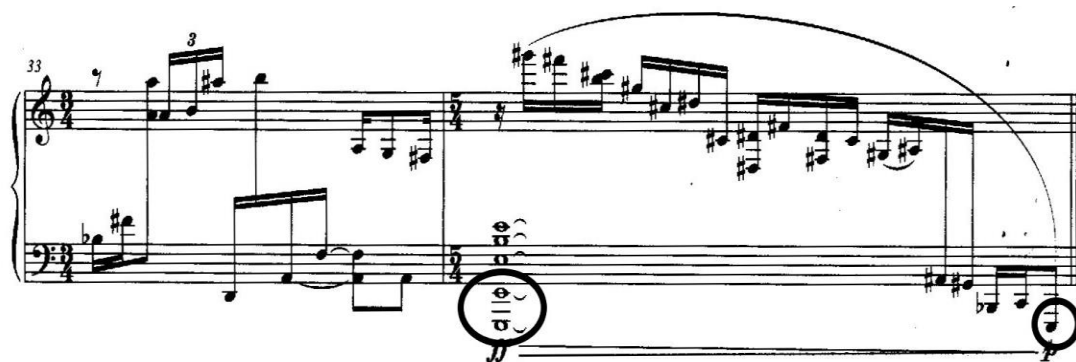
Liberamente begins on D, the dominant of G minor, and closes on another A \flat major triad, the Neapolitan. Picker adds a raised sixth, E \sharp , from the G melodic minor scale (*Example 29*) to this \flat II chord.

Example 29. *Liberamente*, mm. 103-106



Feroce begins once again on the dominant of G minor, but this time the final measure of the third piece terminates with a pedal point on E \sharp (*Example 30*), the raised sixth that was foreshadowed in addition to the \flat II chord at the conclusion of *Liberamente*.

Example 30. *Feroce*, mm. 33-34



The key center relationships connecting *Three Pieces for Piano* serve as an example of how Picker's pieces are tonal even when they may seem atonal.

The relationships between the predominant bII chords at the final measures of *Svelto* and *Liberamente* followed by the dominant scale degree D follow tonal rules of harmonic progression. The tonal leanings Picker derives from his serial compositions may be better understood because of the tonal connections between the three pieces and the structural use of the melodic minor scale from the end of *Liberamente* to the end of *Feroce*.

Serkin revealed to a music critic that Picker made changes to the score close to the premiere and after. He changed an ending so many times between the private preview performance and Serkin's two New York performances that Picker said himself, "from a certain perspective, composers are better off dead. They can't change things."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Valdes, "A Concerted Performance," E1.

CHAPTER V

THE BLUE HULA, WHERE THE RIVERS GO, FOUR ETUDES FOR URSULA

The Blue Hula is a transcription of the second movement of a sextet by the same name that Picker composed in 1980 while living in Hawaii. The title of the piece came from a lyric in the 1933 satirical song, *The Carioca*⁹⁶ complete with interesting tempo and meter changes.

...Now that you've done the Carioca, You'll never care to do the Polka, And then you'll realize the blue hula and bamboola are through.⁹⁷

Picker scored the original three-movement work for what many composers in the twentieth century have come to call "Pierrot Plus Percussion."⁹⁸

Schoenberg was the first to compose for the ensemble of flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano in his work *Pierrot Lunaire*, but Picker added percussion to the ensemble as this instrumentation had become somewhat of a standard in modern repertoire.

⁹⁶ Picker, Interview by Amy Harris, 2019.

⁹⁷ <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/1025410/Fred+Astaire/The+Carioca>. Accessed July 21, 2019.

⁹⁸ Picker, "Program Notes," <http://tobiaspicker.com/portfolio/the-blue-hula-2/>.

Picker arranged *The Blue Hula* for solo piano in 1990 when he composed the “modernist 20’s-jazz encore”⁹⁹ for pianist Leonid Kuzmin’s debut at Lincoln Center. The arrangement for solo piano consists of only the second movement of the original work for ensemble. Robert Carl describes the roughly two-minute piece as a “post-jazz” modernist cakewalk.¹⁰⁰ It is bouncy and fun with changing meters, much syncopation, and lyrical passages juxtaposed with rhythmic episodes.¹⁰¹ The Ragtime influence brings to mind Stravinsky’s solo piano pieces such as *Ragtime* for its use of syncopation and *Piano Rag* for its use of three-stave writing for two hands, stride bass, and constantly changing meters.

The Blue Hula for solo piano is another piece that uses metric modulation similarly to *When Soft Voices Die* and *Keys to the City*. Throughout *The Blue Hula*, one may detect an increase in tempo and intensity. The piece begins with the metronome marking of 160 to the eighth note. The 6/8 meter consists of swung eighth-notes written out rhythmically in measures 1 and 2 (*Example 31*). The rhythm in measures 5 through 7 in 3/8 meter consists of the pivoting rhythmic material to smoothly change the dotted sixteenth-note to the eighth-note that equals 212 beats per minute beginning in measure 8 (*Example 32*). The opening tempo of the eighth-note equals 160 has increased by 32.5% at measure 8. At this point in the piece and continuing through measure 16, the

⁹⁹ Gimbel, “Guide to Records,” p. 132.

¹⁰⁰ Carl, “Picker: Keys to the City, Four Etudes for Ursula, Etc/Ursula Oppens,” p. 206.

¹⁰¹ Hinson, “Guide to Pianists Repertoire,” p. 763.

harmonic center is the dominant of B major. By measure 9 a melodic subject enters in the right hand, and a counter subject in the bass register appears in measure 12 (*Examples 32 and 33*). These two voices are treated contrapuntally as in a fugue in measures 13-15 on top of the continuous percussive bass line in F# Major, and the resulting dense texture builds suspense for the next metric modulation (*Example 34*).

Example 31. The Blue Hula, mm. 1-2

Example 31 shows the first two measures of 'The Blue Hula'. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 160. The right hand features a melodic line with triplets, and the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with triplets and accented eighth notes. The dynamic is marked 'mp'.

Example 32. The Blue Hula, mm. 3-9

Example 32 shows measures 3-9 of 'The Blue Hula'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 3-5) shows a continuation of the rhythmic pattern in the left hand and a new melodic line in the right hand. The second system (measures 6-9) shows a change in dynamics to 'ff' and 'p', and the introduction of a 'Subject' in the right hand. The key signature changes to F# Major, indicated by 'V of B Major'.

Example 33. *The Blue Hula*, mm. 10-12

Musical score for measures 10-12 of *The Blue Hula*. The score is in 8/8 time. Measure 10 shows a complex melodic line in the right hand with many beamed eighth notes. Measure 11 continues this pattern. Measure 12 features a boxed-in musical phrase in the right hand, labeled *p sub. Counter Subject*. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment of eighth notes.

Example 34. *The Blue Hula*, mm. 13-17

Musical score for measures 13-17 of *The Blue Hula*. The score is in 8/8 time. Measures 13-14 show a melodic phrase in the right hand, boxed and labeled *p*. Measures 15-17 show a more complex melodic line in the right hand, with a large slur spanning across measures 15, 16, and 17. The left hand continues with a steady accompaniment. There are some markings below the staff in measures 13-14 that appear to be "Red." followed by a line.

The tempo is twice as fast at measure 19 where the eighth-note equals the quarter-note at 212 bpm (*Example 35*). The rhythm returns to a bouncy

swing, this time in 4/4 meter, and the constant harmonic support on each beat in the bass is an E Minor⁷ chord in third inversion. This chord is related to the tonal center of B as it is the subdominant. Metric modulation returns the tempo to the eighth-note equals 212 at measure 28 (*Example 36*), but the swung note value is now the sixteenth note, so even though the tempo has decreased by half on the score, anyone listening to the piece would not readily notice a change in tempo. The A^b tonality is introduced in the stride bass line while the right hand continues to play B Major⁷ chords on every division of the beat. In measure 29 the right hand employs the dominant⁷ of A^b while the left hand supports the treble harmony with a clashing G major broken chord.

Example 35. The Blue Hula, mm. 18-22

The musical score for Example 35, 'The Blue Hula', measures 18-22, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 18 and 19, and the second system covers measures 20 and 21. The score is in 4/4 time. Measures 18 and 19 are marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a 'lunga' (long) note. Measures 20 and 21 are marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a 'cresc. poco a poco sempre' (crescendo poco a poco sempre) instruction. The bass line in measures 20 and 21 is marked 'iv 4/2 of B'. The right hand plays chords, and the left hand plays a steady eighth-note pattern.

Example 36. The Blue Hula, mm. 28-31

28 $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ B Major 7
 p sub. sfz p sub. sfz
 A-flat Major G Major
 V of A-flat
 3 3 3 3
 30 f sfz
 3 3 3 3

Picker continues this pattern for another two measures, then after three measures of transition consisting of dominant and tonic harmony in G major, the tonality in the stride bass accompaniment centers around G Major and its dominant until measure 41 (*Example 37*). From measure 49 to the end of the piece harmonic support centers around the dominant and subdominant of B, and finally the return of the stride bass line in A \flat supporting a B Major⁷ chord appears in measure 59 followed by the harmonies seen in measures 28 and 29. *The Blue Hula* closes in A \flat (*Example 38*).

Example 37. *The Blue Hula*, mm. 34-42

The musical score for Example 37, *The Blue Hula*, measures 34-42, is presented in four systems. The key signature is G Major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes a piano (p) and a right-hand part (RH) with various dynamic markings and articulations.

System 1 (Measures 34-35): The piano part (left) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 34 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 35. The right-hand part (right) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 34 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 35. The dynamic marking *f* is present in measure 35, and *pp sub.* is present in measure 36.

System 2 (Measures 36-37): The piano part (left) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 36 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 37. The right-hand part (right) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 36 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 37. The dynamic marking *ff* is present in measure 36, and *f* is present in measure 37.

System 3 (Measures 38-39): The piano part (left) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 38 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 39. The right-hand part (right) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 38 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 39. The dynamic marking *ff* is present in measure 38, and *mf* is present in measure 39.

System 4 (Measures 40-42): The piano part (left) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 40 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 41. The right-hand part (right) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 40 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 41. The dynamic marking *pp* is present in measure 40, *ff* is present in measure 41, and *sfz* is present in measure 42.

The score is labeled "G Major" and "V of G" (V of G Major) below the piano part.

Example 38. *The Blue Hula*, mm. 57-62

57 *ff* *f* *p* *ff* *f* B Major 7 A-flat Major

60 *p* *p sub.* *f sub.* *p* V of A-flat G Major A-flat Major

The tempo never changes after the last tempo modulation at measure 28, and the speed of the piece ends up being 32.5% faster than it was at the beginning. Interestingly, the audio recording of *The Blue Hula* performed by the *New York New Music Ensemble*¹⁰² seems to revert to the original tempo of 160 quarter notes per minute. The ensemble slows down drastically in comparison to the solo piano arrangement of *The Blue Hula*. In fact, the performance of the chamber version lasts two minutes and thirty-two seconds whereas the piano version finishes in two minutes and eleven seconds. The chamber version is essentially 16% longer than the piano version, and the fun rhythmic drive and intensity in the piano arrangement are relatively non-existent in the original

¹⁰² Picker, "Program Notes," <http://tobiaspicker.com/portfolio/the-blue-hula-2/>.

chamber version. Picker attributes the changes of tempo in the performances of the chamber and solo piano versions of *The Blue Hula* to the interpretation and taste of the individual performers as opposed to different tempo markings between the two scores. For example, here is the copy of measures 93-105 (*Example 39*) of the score for chamber ensemble that corresponds to measures 9-20 of the version for piano (*Examples 32-35.*)

Example 39. *The Blue Hula for Chamber Ensemble*, mm. 93-105

The image displays a handwritten musical score for a chamber ensemble, specifically measures 93 through 105. The score is written on multiple staves, with the following components:

- PNO.** (Piano): The top staff, starting at measure 93, contains a melodic line with various accidentals and dynamics.
- Subject**: A section of the piano part, measures 93-97, is circled and labeled "Subject".
- vn.** (Violin): The staff below the piano part contains a melodic line, with measures 93-97 circled.
- vn.** (Violin): A second violin staff, starting at measure 97, contains a melodic line with measures 97-100 circled.
- Counter Subject**: A section of the second violin part, measures 97-100, is circled and labeled "Counter Subject".
- vc.** (Violoncello): The bottom staff contains a melodic line, with measures 97-100 circled.

At the bottom of the page, there is a small logo for "No. M-20 20 Staves" and the number "13". To the right, the address "1595 BROADWAY, N.Y." is printed.

Handwritten musical score for a symphony, page 19. The score is written for the following instruments: Flute (Fl.), Piano (Pno.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vcl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Glockenspiel (Glck.), and Cello/Double Bass (Vcl. & Kb.).

The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes staves for Fl., Pno., Vln., and Vcl. The second system includes staves for Fl., Cl., Glck., Pno., Vln., and Vcl. & Kb.

Key markings and annotations include:

- Fl.:** First system has two boxed-in measures. Second system has a circled measure.
- Pno.:** First system has a circled measure. Second system has a circled measure.
- Vln.:** First system has a circled measure. Second system has a circled measure.
- Vcl.:** First system has a circled measure. Second system has a circled measure.
- Cl.:** Second system has a circled measure.
- Glck.:** Second system has a circled measure.
- Pno.:** Second system has a circled measure.
- Vcl. & Kb.:** Second system has a circled measure.

Dynamic markings and performance instructions are present throughout the score, including:

- pp* (pianissimo)
- ma sempre cresc.* (but always crescendo)
- cresc.* (crescendo)
- pp* (pianissimo)
- ma sempre cresc.* (but always crescendo)
- cresc.* (crescendo)
- pp* (pianissimo)
- ma sempre cresc.* (but always crescendo)
- cresc.* (crescendo)

The page number 19 is written at the bottom center of the page.

Where the Rivers Go

Composed in 1994 and published in 1995, *Where the Rivers Go*, a complement to *Old and Lost Rivers*,¹⁰³ was conceived after a one-sitting improvisation. The piece is highly tonal in the key of B \flat minor. Picker wrote this piece in 1994 as he began working on his first opera, *Emmeline* (1996).¹⁰⁴ At the point he began composing opera, Picker abandoned the use of 12-tone serialism in his works. The emotional and moody piano music became the basis for the opera's opening scene that triggers words having to do with loss, sadness, and religious faith.¹⁰⁵ The music accurately reflects the opera's 19th century New England setting with its neo-Romantic tone.

Intriguingly, *Where the Rivers Go* shares the same key signature as *Old and Lost Rivers*, but whereas the latter is in D \flat major, *Where the Rivers Go* is in the relative minor of B \flat . In this piece especially, the form that Picker's Tourette's Syndrome takes in shaping his compositions seems clear in measures such as 45 through 48. Up to measure 44, *Where the Rivers Go* is consistently in 4/4 meter except for one measure in 6/4, and every note is diatonic to the key of B \flat minor (*Example 40*).

¹⁰³ Picker, Interview by Amy Harris, 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Gimbel, "Guide to Records," p. 132.

¹⁰⁵ Picker, Tobias. "*Collected Works for Solo Piano*." p. 4.

Example 40. *Where the Rivers Go*, mm. 1-6



Beginning in measure 44, Picker alters meters in nearly every measure ranging from 5/4 to 6/4, 4/4, and ending in 7/8 at measure 48. Many chromatic alterations are included, and the rhythmic cohesiveness in the first 44 measures is interrupted by polyrhythms in measures 45 through 47 (*Example 41*).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Picker, Tobias. "Collected Works for Solo Piano." p. 10.

Example 41. *Where the Rivers Go*, mm. 41-50

The musical score for Example 41, measures 41-50, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 41-44) is marked *a tempo* and *mf*. It features a treble and bass staff with a key signature of three flats and a 4/4 time signature. The second system (measures 45-48) is marked *f* and includes a large curved line across the first measure. The third system (measures 49-50) is marked *rall.* and *a tempo*, with dynamics *pp* and *ppp*. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

The relatively calm atmosphere created in the first 44 measures of *Where the Rivers Go* returns in measure 49 and the piece remains diatonic until measures 116 through 120 when another rush of energy interrupts the tranquil ripples in the water (Example 42).

Example 42. *Where the Rivers Go*, mm. 113-123

The image displays a musical score for piano, measures 113 through 123. The score is written in B-flat minor (three flats) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 113-116) shows a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand, with triplets in the final measures. The second system (measures 117-120) includes tempo markings: *rall.* (rallentando) and *rall. molto* (rallentando molto), with a *molto* marking at the end of the system. The third system (measures 121-123) begins with a *f* (forte) dynamic and a tempo marking of *a tempo (poco meno)* (at tempo, slightly less). The score features various musical notations including slurs, ties, and triplets.

At measure 122 the serene character found in the opening 44 measures of the piece returns once again. The melody soars into the higher register and sixteenth-notes enter into the rhythmic surface of the B \flat minor tonality as the rivers wind through different landscapes, but the chromatic and dissonant bursts of harmony never return. The opening melodic and rhythmic material reappears at measure 144 (*Example 43*) at a much slower tempo than at the beginning of the piece, and finally concludes at measure 163 with a sustained B \flat in the bass

and an octave on A \flat , a compound minor seventh higher, in the extreme register of the keyboard at a dynamic level of *pppp*.

Example 43. Where the Rivers Go, mm. 141-163

The musical score for 'Where the Rivers Go' (Example 43) spans measures 141 to 163. It is written for piano and bass. The key signature is G major (one sharp), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into four systems. The first system (measures 141-144) begins with a *riten.* marking and a *pp* dynamic. The second system (measures 145-150) features a *p sub.* and *mp* dynamic. The third system (measures 151-156) includes a *p sub.* and *pp* dynamic. The fourth system (measures 157-163) is marked *sempre dim.* and *pppp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and a triplet in measure 141.

Picker mentioned in an interview that he lives his life controlled by Tourette's, but he uses music to control it.¹⁰⁷ Measures 45 through 48 and measures 116 to 121 may serve as examples of Picker controlling the spurts of energy caused by Tourette's through his process of composing. These measures divide the piece into three distinct sections: A, A^I, and A^{II}. Measures 1 – 44 mark the A section where the bass accompaniment pattern is made mainly of syncopated eighth-notes and quarter-notes. Measures 49 – 115 indicate the A^I section for its addition of grace notes to the syncopated accompaniment pattern of the previous section, and measures 122 to 143 are section A^{II} for the replacement of the anticipated syncopated accompaniment pattern with polyrhythms and sixteenth-notes. An abbreviated return of the A section rounds out the piece beginning at measure 144.

In the course of his friendship with neurologist and author Oliver Sacks (1933 – 2015),¹⁰⁸ who once said "If an artist has a condition like this, it is very possible it may enter into his art or creativity in some way,"¹⁰⁹ Picker discovered that his music and Tourette's together are what helped him. That realization

¹⁰⁷ Rhiannon Harries, "Oliver Sacks & Tobias Picker," *The Independent on Sunday*; London (UK), (September 26, 2010): 54 accessed on April 29, 2019, <https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/754914821?accountid=14604>.

¹⁰⁸ Author of *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, First Vintage Books Ed. 2008. Oliver Sacks discusses Tobias Picker's Tourette's Syndrome and how music has helped him on pages 99 and 252.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Schwarz, "A Composer Freed by Opera to be Tonal and Tuneful," p. 17.

made Picker see his music in a different light in that he believes the Tourette's is present in it.¹¹⁰

Four Etudes for Ursula

The final work I wish to present in this study is Picker's brittle and virtuosic *Four Etudes for Ursula*. Ursula Oppens, together with Northwestern University, commissioned this work in 1997.¹¹¹ The etudes show remarkable drive and real continuity despite their sense of nervous energy. All together, these four pieces make an energetic and convincing show piece, and they display the amount of growth as a composer Picker had achieved over the preceding two decades.¹¹²

Although I disagree with his assessment, music critic Allan Kozinn considers the title of *Etudes* for these four pieces to be a misnomer, in that none of them work on any one specific technical challenge. Rather, in Kozinn's opinion, the four individual works are more similar to character pieces¹¹³ that are a personal character study of Oppens herself.¹¹⁴ These pieces show that there is

¹¹⁰ Harries, "Oliver Sacks & Tobias Picker," p. 54.

¹¹¹ Michael Ullman, "Saint Ursula: The personal and professional attention she pays makes Ursula Oppens a composer's pianist," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Boston, 281, no. 5 (May 1998): 112-116, *Proquest*, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/223115155/98B48DE90209447FPQ/1?accountid=14604>.

¹¹² Carl, "Picker: Keys to the City, Four Etudes for Ursula, Etc/Ursula Oppens," p. 206.

¹¹³ Kozinn, "An Energetic Pianistic Program with Wine as Accompaniment," E2.

¹¹⁴ Edward Greenfield, "Review: Classical: Ursula Oppens: Aldeburgh Festival." *The Guardian*, Jun 26, 1997, 7:2, accessed June 17, 2019, *ProQuest*, <https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/245132147?accountid=14604>.

life in traditional virtuoso feats of stamina, accuracy, machine-gun octaves, and fireworks in double notes,¹¹⁵ and these are all characteristic styles with which Oppens deals best. The third etude is more romantic and broodingly elegant than the other three. This etude reflects Rachmaninoff's *Etude Tableau Op. 39. No. 2*, also in A minor, for its persistent polyrhythms, dark character, and extreme registers. Picker's inclusion of only one etude of this style indicates his appreciation for Oppens' skills in that, admittedly so, playing slower and in a more expressive romantic way is more difficult for her than executing the fast and showy fireworks present in etudes one, two, and four.¹¹⁶

I feel the *Four Etudes for Ursula* are aptly named; however, the issues tackled in each etude are more rhythmic and formulaic than purely technical. The pieces require the highest amount of technical skill to play convincingly, but the focus in each etude is not on one single technique. *Etude 1* is a study in melodic sequence and syncopation. The first appearance of a motive followed by sequences is found in measures 9 – 11 and in measure 14 (*Example 44*). A different melody made up of thirds is followed by its sequence from measures 23

¹¹⁵ Richard Dyer, "Unflappable Oppens Parades her Virtuosity," *Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, August 13, 1997, D, 2:3, accessed June 18, 2019 *ProQuest*, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/403881063/5BAFF92ED4B74C27PQ/1?accountid=14604>.

¹¹⁶ Ullman, "Saint Ursula: The personal and professional attention she pays makes Ursula Oppens a composer's pianist," <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/central/docview/223115155/98B48DE90209447FPQ/1?accountid=14604>.

to 26 (*Example 45*), and a stylistically vocal melody is followed by its sequence from measures 69 to 72 (*Example 46*).

Example 44. Etude 1 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm. 9-16

Musical score for Example 44, Etude 1 from Four Etudes for Ursula, measures 9-16. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system (measures 9-12) features a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a "Motive" in measure 9 and its "Sequence" in measures 10-12. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The second system (measures 13-16) features a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The right hand continues the melodic sequence in measure 13 and then has a more complex, arpeggiated passage in measures 14-16. The left hand continues the harmonic accompaniment.

Example 45. Etude 1 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm.21-28

Example 46. Etude 1 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm.69-72

The first example of syncopation is found in measures 1 and 2 written in 4/4 time. The lack of bass notes on beats one and two of measure 2 causes the meter to sound more like 6/4 than 4/4. The accent on beat one of measure 5 brings a sense of 4/4 back to the ear (*Example 47*). Throughout the piece instances of syncopation appear, including one textbook example in the treble clef from measures 61 to 64 (*Example 48*).

Example 47. Etude 1 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm. 1-8

Piano

$\text{♩} = 112$

sfz p f p

5 *f*

Example 48. Etude 1 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm. 61-64

61

Etude 2 is written in a modified five-part rondo form. Measures 1 to 7 make up the A section, and measures 8 to 17 are A¹ (Example 49). Within the A sections a driving gallop of repeated notes at measures 5, 12 (Example 49), 16 and 17 (Example 50) provides a false build-up of energy for the beginning of the more lyrical B section. Whereas polyrhythms of 4 sixteenth-notes against 3

eighth-notes are a large part of the rhythmic makeup in the A sections, the B section, beginning at measure 18 (*Example 50*), is filled with polyrhythms of 3 half-notes against 7 quarter-notes and 2 half-notes against 5 quarter-notes. The A section returns with added sequences of the initial measure of the section at measure 29, and the rhythm of the etude becomes jazzier at a slower tempo beginning with the C section at measure 40 (*Example 51*). Picker includes a syncopated line of melodic counterpoint from measures 42 through 50 (*Example 51*), and he incorporates a transition which loosely resembles the A section at measure 51, this time without polyrhythm. I think of pieces by Bartók such as *Bear Dance* from Sz. 39 at measures 59 to 62 (*Example 52*) because of the tight chromatic chordal movement in one hand and the single-note chromatic motion in the other. In measure 63 Picker commences the final A section (*Example 53*) with the opening motive this time accompanied by, rather than followed by, the galloping figure that appeared in the A¹ section. He ends the piece on a resounding E_b in the bass.

Example 49. Etude 2 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm. 1- 15

A

$\text{♩} = 164$

f

Gallop

A1

Gallop

Example 50. Etude 2 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm.16-27

Gallop

16

B

p

19

cresc.

23

p sub.

26

Example 51. Etude 2 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm.39-47

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 39 begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a fermata over the first two measures. A large bracket indicates a tempo change to "C/Slower" starting at measure 40. The dynamic shifts to forte (*f*) at measure 40. The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 42 shows a continuation of the right-hand melody. Measure 45 features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand, marked with a "3" and a slur. The score concludes at measure 47.

Example 52. Etude 2 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm.59-62

Bartók Bear Dance

Example 53. Etude 2 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm.63-69

Final A Section

Gallop

Etude 3 in A minor is a lyrical study in polyrhythms. Through the entire piece, Picker composes polyrhythms such as 6 eighth-notes against 7 or 5 eighth-notes against 6 that result in the sound of alternating bass and treble chords. By using polyrhythms in this manner, the tempo seems to wax and wane similarly to the use of metric modulation, but the effect of Picker's use of polyrhythms in *Etude 3* is more of rubato than a regimented accelerando or ritardando that can result from the use of metric modulation. This etude also seems more readily cohesive than the other three in that the opening descending melodic motive appears regularly throughout the piece in different registers and embellished by harmonic intervals in the melody (*Example 54*).

[illegible]

The image displays four staves of musical notation for Etude 4, measures 13 through 22. The notation is written for a single melodic line on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Measure 13 shows a melodic line with a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 14 includes a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 15 features a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 16 has a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 17 includes a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 18 has a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 19 features a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 20 includes a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 21 has a 6th finger and a 7th finger. Measure 22 features a 6th finger and a 7th finger. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, fingerings (6, 7), and dynamic markings (mf, cresc., p, ff, rall., a tempo).

Etude 4 is a smorgasbord of the rhythmic features found in the previous three etudes, but crisp staccato technique is a requirement throughout the piece. Picker develops the melodic motive in measure one by adding motivic repetitions of sixteenth notes in measures 4 and 5 (*Example 55*). Melodic figures in measure 13 follow a similar contour to the theme in measure 1 (*Example 56*), as does the figure in the middle staff of measure 20 (*Example 57*).

Etude 4

♩ = 96 - 100

f

f

sub

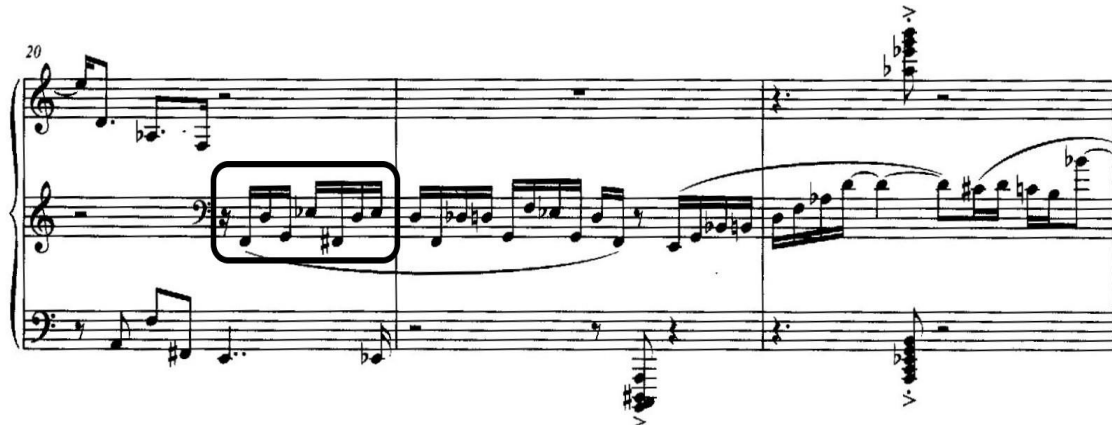
sub

sub

13

Handwritten musical score for 'The Rose Tree'. The score is written on three staves: Treble, Alto, and Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The first staff (Treble) contains the melody, with a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The second staff (Alto) contains a vocal line, with a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The third staff (Bass) contains a bass line, with a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The score is divided into two systems by a double bar line. The first system ends with a double bar line, and the second system begins with a double bar line. The score is written in a clear, legible hand.

Example 57. Etude 4 from *Four Etudes for Ursula*, mm. 20-22



Counterpoint and polyrhythms collide in measures such as 7 through 10

(*Example 58*). An element of jazz and syncopation appears from measures 98 to 102 (*Example 59*), and polyrhythms are prominent once again in measures such as 105 to 110 (*Example 60*).

Example 58. Etude 4 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm. 7-12

The musical score is presented in two systems, measures 7-12. The notation is for a piano, with a grand staff consisting of a treble clef, a bass clef, and a sub-octave bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system (measures 7-9) features a treble staff with eighth-note triplets and a bass staff with a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. The second system (measures 10-12) continues the treble staff melody and the bass staff accompaniment, which includes some rests in measures 11 and 12. The sub-octave bass staff contains a continuous eighth-note accompaniment throughout the measures.

Example 59. Etude 4 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm. 97-101

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 97-100) features a treble and bass staff. Measure 97 has a treble staff with a sixteenth-note triplet (marked '6') and a bass staff with a triplet (marked '3'). A crescendo hairpin leads to measure 100, which is marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The second system (measures 101-102) continues the piece. Measure 101 has a treble staff with a sixteenth-note triplet (marked '3') and a bass staff with a triplet (marked '3'). Measure 102 has a treble staff with a sixteenth-note triplet (marked '3') and a bass staff with a triplet (marked '3'). The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Example 60. Etude 4 from Four Etudes for Ursula, mm. 105-11

The piece ends on a final A minor chord with added chord members 11 and 9 (*Example 61*), but the resulting sound is that of a tone cluster more than a jazz chord due to the extremely low register in the bass. Nonetheless, this is a suitable ending considering the first beat of this etude and the first beat of the following two measures is an A minor chord with a tone cluster of half steps on A in an even lower register in the bass (*Example 55*).

Example 61. Etude 4 from *Four Etudes for Ursula*, mm. 121-123

The musical score is for Example 61, Etude 4 from *Four Etudes for Ursula*, measures 121-123. It is written for piano in 6/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Measure 121 begins with a treble clef and a whole rest, followed by a series of chords and single notes. Measure 122 features a continuous eighth-note pattern in the left hand and chords in the right hand. Measure 123 concludes with a final chord in the right hand and a complex, dotted bass line in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings such as 8^{va} and 8^{vb} , and a fermata over the final chord.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Since his birth on July 18, 1954, Tobias Picker was destined to be a musician and composer of the highest rank. Learning to appreciate the lives and music of such composers as Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Wagner, and Gershwin throughout his childhood gave Picker a head start into the world and life of a professional composer. As he grew older, he learned to garner the spurts of energy that come with his Tourette's Syndrome into his musical compositions. His nearly lifelong friendship with pianist Ursula Oppens played a large role in the success of Picker's piano works, as she performed and recorded all the works in the collection *Picker: Collected Works for Solo Piano*, published by Schott, on the album *Keys to the City*, produced by Wergo, a leading label for contemporary music. Although Picker is known widely for his five operas to date, his piano works continue to appear on concert stages across this country and others.

Despite his studies with 12-tone serialist composers, Picker maintains that his own compositions are tonal. Even when writing a 12-tone piece, the order of pitches he chooses originates from tonal leanings and suggests

progressions of further tonality. The phrasing, dynamic drive, and structure of pieces such as Picker's second *Etude for Ursula* in rondo form allude to earlier and more traditional periods of composition. The harmonic connections between pieces in *Three Pieces for Piano* follow typical progressions found in common practice compositions.

Throughout the nearly two decades worth of compositions by Tobias Picker in his *Collected Works for Solo Piano*, one finds many influences from his composition teachers. The earliest pieces, *When Soft Voices Die* (1977), *Piano Concerto No. 2: Keys to the City*, (1983), and *The Blue Hula* (originally written for ensemble in 1981), all make use of metric modulation, the creation of which is credited to Elliott Carter. Pop and jazz styles, influences of Milton Babbitt, are evident in *The Blue Hula* (1990 arrangement for piano), *Keys to the City*, and the *Second Etude* from *Four Etudes for Ursula* (1996.) Serial techniques including use of the 12-tone row are found in *Three Pieces for Piano* (1990), *When Soft Voices Die*, and *Keys to the City*. Charles Wuorinen as well as Carter and Babbitt had a role in influencing Picker to utilize this method of composition. *Old and Lost Rivers* (1986), originally an improvisation for piano inspired by a road sign and dedicated to Oppens, holds a special place in the literature as it is highly tonal in D \flat and has become one of Picker's most beloved works. *Where the Rivers Go* (1995), also tonal in B \flat minor is another one-sitting improvisation, and it demonstrates how the composer controls his symptoms of Tourette's

Syndrome with his music while also using Tourette's as a creative force in his compositions.

Tobias Picker's first inspirations in music came from his family. Without the discourse between family members regarding who was the better composer, Picker may not have been interested in following a similar path as the composers he learned about as a child, and we would not have his musical works to enjoy today.

In the future I will encourage my local MTNA chapter to include Picker's works such as *Old and Lost Rivers*, *The Blue Hula*, and *Where the Rivers Go* in their most advanced list of selections of contemporary repertoire. His piano music is not studied or performed enough by the public to gain the recognition it deserves, and I believe incorporating it into the literature of state and country-wide piano auditions could bring awareness to the musical originality and value of these pieces.

One day I would like to further investigate Picker's relationship with Oliver Sacks. I know that performing and composing music plays a large part in developing the brain, and I would like to know more about the insights Sacks gave Picker about how music combines with mental abnormalities to create positive outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

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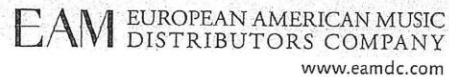
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APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS



September 6, 2019

Ms. Amy Harris
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
7805 Old North Court
Charlotte NC 28270

RE: Picker WHEN SOFT VOICES DIE mm. 1, 2, 5, 6, 48-55

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Date: 5/28/2019

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Approval

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Study Title: A Study of the Piano Works by Tobias Picker

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I will study the history behind each of Tobias Picker's piano works and give performance suggestions when applicable. I will interview Tobias Picker as part of my research. I will most likely interview Mr. Picker over the phone and through email correspondence.

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